Three American Voices: A Dialogue Between

Harper Lee, Langston Hughes, and You

Overview:

For this assignment, you’re going to compare and contrast *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the poems of Langston Hughes focusing on one or two literary elements. In addition, you will add your own thoughtful insights along with the ideas of two of America’s greatest writers.

Instead of writing an essay, you’re going to write this as a dialogue in script format where you give a voice to yourself and the deceased authors. Think of yourself as a moderator or a talk show host asking questions and making observations. It will feel strange at first, but you’ll get the hang of it.

You will focus on **one or two** literary elements discussed in class. The authors will need to comment on the literary element/s using specific passages from their works we read in class.

For example, if Harper Lee is discussing the importance of power dynamics in *Mockingbird*, she should give a direct quotation from the novel, then comment on the meaning behind the passage. Langston Hughes could then reply to Lee with a quotation that is similar or contrasting from one his poems that he will then explain. Then you can chime in with your opinion or tie it to something happening in America right now.

Format:

* Three to four pages
* Size 12 font
* Single-spaced

Grading Criteria:

* Quality of your quotations
* Analysis of quotations by the authors and yourself
* Your ability to stay focused and dig deep into literary element/s

Final Thoughts:

* Be creative
* Take chances
* Entertain your reader
* Flex those analytical muscles

Sample Formatting of the Script:

PATTERSON: Mr. Fitzgerald, when you write, “There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of [Gatsby’s] dream”, are you trying to illustrate that Gatsby loved the idea of Daisy more than her as a person (101)?

FITZGERALD: With Gatsby’s character, and that passage specifically, I was trying to illustrate that people are most often interested in striving to get something than they are with actually achieving the dream. I also wanted to show how Gatsby’s dream is flawed: it’s an illusion only based on materialism, and that’s one reason it ultimately failed.

PATTERSON: Mr. Hughes, you discuss the idea of dreams in your poem, “A Dream Deferred.” How is the dream outlined in that poem different than Gatsby’s materialistic dream?

HUGHES: That poem is about African Americans, and all minorities and underprivileged classes for that matter, being able to have the American dream of liberty and freedom. It’s not about money; it’s about simply being free. Unlike Gatsby, the narrator of the poem knows that equality is more important than hollow economic desires. In fact, that dream is so essential, that if a group doesn’t get it, they will fight for it. That’s why I wrote the line, “Or does it explode?” If you oppress a group long enough, they will “explode” and fight for what they want.

PATTERSON: Just like what’s happening in many American cities in the twenty-first century. It seems like dreams are important, but some dreams are more noble and worth fighting for than others.

Literary Elements to Focus On:

* Major Themes
* Motifs
* Representation of Characters
* The Portrayal of the American Dream
* Purpose
* Setting
* Symbolism
* Tone or Mood of Writing
* Which Writer is More Hopeful
* Power Dynamics
* Flat Character
* Dynamic Character
* Round Character